

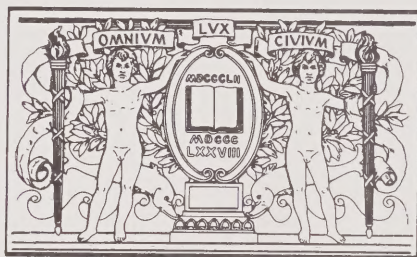
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HISTORY OF BOSTON HARBORPARK NEIGHBORHOODS

A PROFILE

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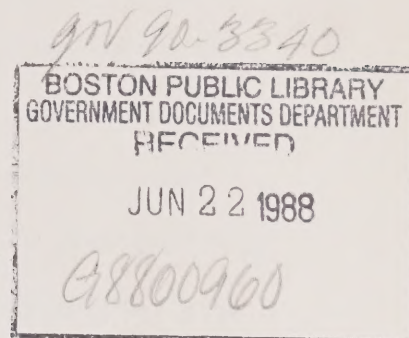
February 1985

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HISTORY OF BOSTON HARBOR NEIGHBORHOODS

Summary

Dorchester, at the time of the American Revolution, was a prosperous area with wealthy landowners living a quiet and peaceful existence. South Boston, which at that time was part of Dorchester, consisted largely of pasture land with only a dozen or so families settled on the land. The North End, meanwhile, bustled with activity; merchants were purchasing waterfront property and wharves were being built to extend further into the harbor. The shipping trade flourished both in the North End and in Charlestown, with the latter featuring handsome homes and a prosperous port. At the same time, East Boston was almost entirely unsettled and consisted of five islands which supplied the Boston area with lumber and fresh meat.

After the Revolution, change was rapid. South Boston was annexed to Boston and bridges were constructed to connect Dorchester and South Boston to Boston Proper. The North End lost most of its wealthy residents as immigrants, industries and tenements moved in. South Boston evolved into an important industrial area providing jobs and housing for immigrant laborers. The United States Navy established a shipyard in Charlestown changing the nature of that neighborhood forever. Shipbuilding and related maritime industries provided jobs for the thousands of Irish immigrants arriving in Boston. In East Boston change occurred more slowly--it wasn't until 1833 that General Sumner bought Noodle Island, changed the name to East Boston and merged the islands into a land mass three times their original size.

The Boston Harbor neighborhoods, all annexed and greatly populated, shot forward into the 20th century without a backward glance. Dorchester became dotted with triple-deckers, which provided housing for working-class people and incited the upper-class residents to panic and move to southern suburbs. South Boston had already lost its upper-class population to the newer and more elegant houses of Back Bay and at the start of the World War I industrial boom, Lithuanians, Poles and Italians had settled in South Boston to supply labor for increasing industrial and warehousing operations. The North End became an immigrant ghetto with roughly 35,000 people crammed into cheap housing along the Waterfront. Charlestown received the elevated transit line and became an easily accessible working-class neighborhood, particularly at wartime when the Navy Yard stepped up production and repair of warships. East Boston changed a great deal physically in the first two decades of the 20th century; the McClellan Highway, Logan Airport and the underwater tunnel for rapid transit were all constructed.

Since World War II change has not been rapid in Boston's harbor neighborhoods, nor until recently has it been economically encouraging. The middle-class left Dorchester as they left city neighborhoods all over the country and Dorchester has remained primarily a working-class neighborhood--depressed and deteriorated in parts. South Boston witnessed the death of the railroad yards as trucking became the primary means of transporting goods. When industry and truck traffic increased residential sections were abandoned and almost a third of South Boston's population was lost. The North End remained relatively unchanged until the 1950s. The construction of tenements stopped as the wave of immigrants ebbed but European peoples still lived in overcrowded

waterfront housing. In 1950, the central artery was constructed, segregating the North End from downtown Boston even to the present day.

Charlestown slid into a depression following World War II--housing deteriorated and the population decreased. The Department of Defense closed the Navy Yard in 1974 and 5,000 jobs were lost. East Boston, perhaps of all the neighborhoods, witnessed the most change. Airport access roads, the expressway and the Callahan Tunnel were developed, and from 1940 to 1970 the population declined as a result of displacement during tunnel construction, faltering neighborhoods, air pollution, noise and congestion all created by Logan Airport, commuter traffic and declining waterfront industrial property.

Throughout all neighborhoods, from 1940 to the 1970s, port activity declined; high labor costs, labor conflict and an inability to effectively compete with the Port of New York allowed Boston docking facilities to stand empty and deteriorate.

Urban renewal impacted Boston harbor neighborhoods in varying degrees. East Boston received little renewal but great amounts of MassPort transportation development. As a result, East Boston has become one of the most politically assertive neighborhoods, demonstrating against transportation encroachments. Charlestown has been the focus of a massive BRA urban renewal effort and the down spiral of the population has been halted. In the North End/ Waterfront area exclusive apartments and condominiums have appeared in old warehouses and high-rise buildings, threatening the way of life for what had lately become a stable, predominantly Italian neighborhood. Renovations continue and pressures mount to turn the North End into a wealthy downtown neighborhood. South Boston remains much the same with the

exception of the dramatic rebirth of the Boston Marine Industrial Park. The industrial, transportation and urban development potential of South Boston is expanding and MassPort, EDIC and the BRA are working to usher it along.

Dorchester was afflicted with the Southeast Expressway in 1959. This highway effectively divided the neighborhood and separated the beach areas from the rest of the community. It served to even further isolate the Columbia Point Public Housing Project which was occupied in 1954 and is now largely vacant and deteriorated. The Expo Center, the University of Massachusetts and the John F. Kennedy Library have all been constructed on Columbia Point which remains difficult to reach by public transportation and almost impossible to reach by foot.

Dorchester, the North End and Charlestown have all been "discovered" by young, professional, middle-class households. In Dorchester large Victorian and triple-decker dwellings have been purchased and renovated. In the North End and Charlestown, young people have moved into newly rehabilitated apartments and condominiums. This activity is significantly impacting the older residents and the low-income residents of the neighborhoods and the economy of Boston. Coping with the impact of these changes on Boston's harbor neighborhoods will be a major planning and public policy task for years to come.

History of Charlestown

When the English arrived at the peninsula we now know as Charlestown, they found it under the rule of Sachem, widow of Nanepashenit, ruler of the Pawtuckets, a branch of the Sagamore tribe. Sachem and her people were friendly to the white settlers although they did not officially submit to the colonial government for almost fifteen years.

The Pawtuckets had called their land Mishawum and in July 1629 Prince Charles granted the area status as an independent town and bestowed his name upon it. By the time of the American Revolution, Charlestown had become a prosperous sea port, with merchants and sea captains living in large handsome homes. In 1775, the British burned most of the town in the Battle of Bunker Hill and residents fled across the harbor into Boston. By 1780, however, houses had been rebuilt and once again Charlestown flourished as a port.

In 1802 the United States Navy established a shipyard in Charlestown, and the mixture of industry and port-related activities it produced brought fame to Charlestown and jobs to the thousands of Irish immigrants arriving in Boston. The introduction of industry triggered the development of large sections of tenement housing for the workers. Most of this housing was built in areas which are not immediately adjacent to the harbor since much of the waterfront that exists today is fill land reclaimed for industrial use subsequent to residential settlement.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the elevated transit line was constructed, improving transportation connections to Boston, and making Charlestown an even more attractive site for working-class

housing. The Navy Yard rapidly became an integral part of Charlestown's economy, causing exaggerated reactions to national economic trends. For example, during the world wars, the town's population burgeoned with new workers and ships' crews; post-war periods brought unemployment and deterioration. Overcrowding and lack of public and private investment characterized the Depression which followed the boom of World War I activity. Charlestown began to deteriorate and the population began to decrease. Except for a period of expanded war time production during World War II, the deterioration and downward population spiral continued until the completion of the Urban Renewal Program. In 1974, when the Department of Defense closed the Navy Yard, Boston lost 5,000 jobs.

The urban renewal efforts in Charlestown in the 1960s started a period of upheaval for the town. Bunker Hill Community College has opened, low income and elderly housing has been built, and new businesses have come to town. The vacant buildings of the Navy Yard have taken on a new purpose. The City of Boston has developed the 105-acre Navy Yard to include a major waterfront park and housing, commercial, institutional and light industry all housed in recycled historic structures. In 1978, the BRA incorporated the Navy Yard redevelopment into the Charlestown urban renewal plan, thus insuring the careful and orderly development of the area. The Navy Yard is expected to generate 1,700 to 3,000 permanent jobs for the residents of Boston and the metropolitan area.

Related to Charlestown's urban renewal is the 1980s' influx of new residents--young professionals who are rehabilitating the area's fine old homes. Property values have skyrocketed, and with them rents,

creating problems for some longtime residents and young Charlestonians who want to remain in the neighborhood.

History of East Boston

Noodle Island was annexed to the City of Boston in 1637, but remained an isolated agricultural area supplying fresh meat and wood to the City for nearly 200 years. Originally Noodle Island, Hog, Apple, Governor's and Bird Islands were separate harbor islands. The East Boston islands were once heavily forested, but the Massachusetts Indians cleared acreage to plant corn and colonists later used the plentiful timber for fuel. Eventually, the colonists created pastures and farmers began to ferry cattle from the mainland to graze.

In 1833, General William Sumner organized the East Boston Company which bought Noodle Island, changed the name to East Boston and leveled, enlarged and merged the islands into a land mass three times their original size. Today Hog Island is Orient Heights and Apple, Bird and Governor's Islands are the core of Logan Airport.

The East Boston Company established a ferry service to the downtown area, provided a railroad service to the north and began to develop waterfront industry. The goal of the company was to develop a prosperous trading center and an alluring vacation resort. An orderly grid pattern of streets was laid out, the 80-room Maverick House Hotel was constructed in Maverick Square and fine houses with hilltop views of the harbor were built in the Eagle Hill and Jeffries Point area.

From 1840 to 1865, the needs of international shipping spurred the rapid development of East Boston. The Boston Terminal for England's Cunard Steamship Lines was established in East Boston in 1840 and opened the way for waves of immigrants, as well as increasing trade. The ability to transfer goods directly from ship to railroad was an important asset and East Boston had direct connections to all the

manufacturing centers of New England. The population climbed from 1,455 persons in 1840 to 20,572 in 1865, with large suburban homes being developed in the hills and more modest dwellings in the area around Maverick Square. Ten wharves lined the waterfront and there was a sugar refinery, an iron forgery, a bakery, a timber company and a manufacturer of small vessels. Along the wharves were lumber yards, mast and spar makers, fish packers, and grindstone and plastic suppliers.

With the decline of wooden ship building came the exodus of skilled craftsmen from East Boston at a time when many Irish immigrants were arriving to take their place. Successive waves of immigrants, primarily Jews and then Italians, pushed the population of East Boston to a peak level of approximately 60,000 (1916-1935). The Jewish population dwindled as families moved to the more desirable areas of Roxbury, Dorchester and Chelsea, but the Italian population grew. Families set down permanent roots, building homes and churches. Today, the Italian community structure in East Boston continues to be the area's predominant cultural influence.

Between 1900 and 1905, the old Boston Elevated built the first underwater subway tunnel in North America and connected East Boston to downtown. Logan Airport was completed in 1923 and the Sumner Tunnel was constructed in 1934 which allowed vehicle access to the airport and the neighborhood. Commuter and airport traffic strained the one harbor crossing, however, prompting the development of airport access roads, the expressway through East Boston and the Callahan Tunnel all between 1949 and 1961. The introduction of jet aircraft during the 1960s added a new dimension to East Boston's problems with regional transportation facilities.

The major physical changes since 1915 in East Boston have been the growth of regional transportation facilities, particularly the tunnels and the McClellan Highway and Logan Airport. From 1940 to 1970 population declined in East Boston as a result of displacement during tunnel construction and neighborhoods faltered due to air pollution, noise and congestion created by a growing airport and by increasing commuter traffic, as well as from the unpleasant appearance of declining industrial property adjacent to residential areas.

The economics of East Boston's early economic base have changed and East Boston is now faced with adapting the physical environment to the needs of a modern residential community. There has been a burst of community activism in the past decade and East Boston is now one of the most politically aggressive neighborhoods in the City. Through effective demonstrations and several community-based groups, East Bostonians are working together to halt the encroachment of transportation development and to create a livable and viable residential community.

History of the North End

The North End evolved from a populous and prosperous colonial neighborhood to an overcrowded, impoverished ghetto of various European immigrant people. Today it is a vibrant, Italian, working-class community and is the oldest residential section of the City.

The original boundaries fell within a ring drawn by present-day Commercial and North Streets. The western shore of the peninsula where Endicott and Mather Streets are, bordered a cove. Merchants were the logical first settlers in the North End; they bought waterfront property and immediately began building wharves. Throughout most of the early eighteenth century, the North End was a heavily populated and prosperous section of Boston. After the revolution, the neighborhood went through drastic changes. Wealthy citizens moved to the South End, West End or Beacon Hill and by the close of the eighteenth century, the North End was a "region of small merchants, tradesmen and artisans". The mill pond was eventually filled in and additional houses and the first tenements were constructed. By 1800, there were three mills for meal, lumber and chocolate located along the canal which is now Blackstone Street. Another industrial section was created with the filling of an area between Commercial Street and what is now Atlantic Avenue. Factories were built along the waterfront on Fulton and Commercial Streets, and by 1883, the Canal had been filled to create Blackstone Street so that the North End was completely connected to the City.

The nineteenth century was a time of industrialization and vast immigration and by 1900 Boston's population had snowballed from 25,000 to 560,000. Settlement patterns changed as the once-classy waterfront

areas became immigrant ghettos, cramped with cheap housing. Near the harbor and the growing industries, neighborhoods like the North End were close to the point of debarkation and convenient to jobs. The population density in the North End continued to increase as immigrants arrived and new tenements were constructed. By 1920, the last major tenements were built to house a population of approximately 35,000. Between 1920 and 1950, the physical and social characteristics of the North End remained relatively unchanged: the European immigrants worked long hours for low wages under dangerous working conditions, and the economy of Boston flourished as a result.

From 1950 to the present day, several major developments have impacted on the neighborhood. Construction of the central artery in the early 1950s has created a physical barrier separating the North End from the rest of the City. Urban renewal of the 50s and 60s altered the West End, Government Center and Downtown Waterfront/Faneuil Hall, all of which surround the North End and have changed the character of the central City. The presence of the Central Artery has delayed the effects which large-scale urban renewal projects normally have on adjacent neighborhoods. However, because of the Artery's limited life expectancy, its inadequate capacity and its effects on adjacent land uses proposals to reconstruct the Artery have been considered. Funding has yet to be appropriated for the Central Artery, but any construction or rehabilitation will have a significant impact on the social as well as physical environment of the North End.

In addition, the rapidly changing character of the Waterfront is impacting the North End in the form of parking problems and changing real estate patterns. High-rise, luxury apartments have replaced old

wharves and warehouses. The entire North End is once again being viewed as a desirable neighborhood by the wealthy and renovations are pushing rents beyond the means of the present residents. Thus, those people who have fought to make their neighborhood a good place to live, find their way of life threatened.

History of South Boston

The area we know as South Boston has evolved over the years with changes in name and purpose. The native Americans called the peninsula, "Mattapanock" and held sacred the land which contained a fresh water spring and a favorite meeting place.

Early settlers called the land, "Dorchester Neck" and used it as a common pasture, across the bay from their own homes in Dorchester, and by the time of the revolution there were only a dozen families living on Dorchester Neck. The area, with two hills on the east and two hills on the west, proved advantageous to both the British and the colonists. The British built a fort which they called, "Castle William" on a nearby island. In the winter of 1776, Colonel Henry Knox and his soldiers secretly moved cannons from Fort Ticonderoga into Dorchester Neck. The English at Castle Island and the fleet moored in the Harbor were caught by surprise by Colonel Knox and after a brief skirmish, which killed five men, the British troops left Boston forever. Evacuation Day continues to be an important civic event in Boston.

After the evacuation of British troops, the farmers moved back to the Neck and continued their peaceful and rustic lifestyle. This was the way of life on Dorchester Neck until 1803 when real estate speculators purchased vast amounts of land along the sea, intending to develop it as a high income residential neighborhood. In 1804, the speculators petitioned the Town of Boston to annex "Great Neck", and the powerful investors were easily able to outvote the farming families who had been there for generations. Over the intense protest of Dorchester, Boston gained the Neck. Angry local Neck residents renamed the peninsula South Boston in an effort to maintain their autonomy.

Change occurred rapidly. The South Boston bridge was built, providing easy access to Boston which enabled residents to walk to work in town, or central town Bostonians to walk to the new industries springing up in South Boston. By the end of the War of 1812, South Boston was evolving into an important industrial section and an elite residential area.

The pace of development accelerated even further in the 1830s as new bridges were opened and the northern marsh land began to be filled for industrial development. In 1833, the opening of the Old Colony Railroad provided rail access to downtown Boston, Dorchester and the South Shore. As more land was created and industrial development expanded, South Boston became a center for lumber and foundry industries and it increasingly became home to industrial workers and their families, most of whom were Irish immigrants.

The Great Boston Fire of 1874 burned down the tenements of Fort Hill where the poorest of the Irish immigrants had lived. As a result, immigrant laborers crowded into the western sections of South Boston, and as Back Bay was established as Boston's fashionable residential district, South Boston lost its last attraction as a high income neighborhood. In fact, the extension of street car service to the southern and eastern shores in 1890 led to the completion of residential development.

At the end of the nineteenth century other immigrant groups, Lithuanians, Poles and Italians, began to settle in the area supplying laborers for the steady increase of industrial and warehousing operations. The twentieth century has witnessed the railroad yards,

once of vital importance, fall into disuse as trucking and containerized shipping have become primary means of transporting goods and materials.

More recently, the Boston Marine Industrial Park, formerly the South Boston Naval Annex, has experienced a dramatic rebirth, and along with the new sites for industry at the old Boston Army Base, the industrial and transportation potential in South Boston has significantly expanded.

Industrial growth, however, often heavily affects the residential neighborhoods nearby. The northern residential section is now characterized by deteriorated and abandoned housing, a result of a decreased population. As industry and truck traffic increased in South Boston during 1950-1970, almost a third of the population was lost.

History of Dorchester

In 1630, one hundred Puritans set sail on the Mary and John to settle the land between the Charles and Merrimac Rivers. They landed instead on "Mattapanock", or Columbia Point. Trapped between marshy coastal flats on one side and strong tidal rivers on the other, the settlers remained in the Columbia Point area and settled on Savin Hill. Within a year more settlers had arrived at the Dorchester Settlement, and by 1663, Dorchester was the largest and wealthiest town in Massachusetts.

Until 1662, when Milton was set off as a separate township, Dorchester was bounded by Boston, Roxbury, Dedham, Taunton, Bridgewater and Braintree (the present Quincy). The town extended from Dorchester Point, as South Boston was then called and out as far as Castle Island. As portions of Dorchester founded their own town meetings, they formed their own towns so that by 1797 Dorchester was reduced to include South Boston, Dorchester and Hyde Park.

Toward the end of the colonial period, wealthy Bostonians began to build country estates and summer homes on the hilltops of North Dorchester. In 1804, South Boston was annexed to Boston over the protests of wealthy Dorchester and South Boston landowners and in 1805, the South Bridge was constructed providing Dorchester with its first direct link to Boston proper.

The opening of the Boston-Providence Railroad in 1835 and replacement of the North Stage Coach by the Old Colony Railroad in 1844 made Dorchester accessible to upper-middle-class Yankees and Irish who built large one and two family Victorian homes on Savin and Jones Hills.

Replacement of the Dorchester Avenue horse car by the electric car in 1857 opened the area between the hills to further development. Dorchester was quickly becoming a suburb of Boston and rural Hyde Park formed a separate town in 1868 to avoid annexation. In 1869 the people of Dorchester finally voted 928 to 726 in favor of annexation to Boston.

Based on the extension of the street car lines and the municipal water supply, development boomed from 1870 until the start of World War I. It was in this period that the "triple-deckers" blossomed in Dorchester, being considerably cheaper than Victorian homes to construct. With the coming of World War I, anti-immigration feelings and the fear of everything foreign increased. With the influx of working-class people moving into the triple-deckers, the disappearance of most vacant land, and the increase in immigration, many of the older, upper-class residents panicked in 1920 leaving for suburbs further to the South.

After World War II, the middle-class exodus was reinforced by the construction of new highways, widespread automobile ownership, and availability of government VA and FHA mortgages in the suburbs. The rapid suburban expansion into Milton, Randolph and Quincy drained most of the remaining middle-class residents and their children from Dorchester.

In the 1970s and 1980s, young, professional, middle-class families have once again discovered the exceptional housing values of the Dorchester triple-decker and Victorian homes, and have moved into the Columbia-Savin Hill and Uphams Corner-Jones Hill area.

In 1980, Dorchester celebrated its 350th birthday. With increased public and private investment such as the Kennedy Library, the

University of Massachusetts and the Expo Center, the Dorchester neighborhoods will continue their involvement and Dorchester will be considered a fine place to live.

